

# The Virgin with the “Tongues of Fire” on Byzantine Lead Seals

JOHN COTSONIS

Anyone who investigates the iconography of the Virgin soon realizes the importance that lead seals contribute to this line of inquiry. Literally thousands of examples of Marian sphragistic images survive over a span of many centuries. In the early years of this century, the two great Russian *savants* Lihačev<sup>1</sup> and Kondakov<sup>2</sup> turned to this rich body of material for their monumental classifications of the iconographic types of the Virgin. Since their fundamental publications, numerous scholars, such as Galavaris,<sup>3</sup> Oikonomides,<sup>4</sup> Cutler,<sup>5</sup> Kalavrezou,<sup>6</sup> and Seibt,<sup>7</sup> have employed sphragistic representations of the Theotokos in their studies related to images of the Virgin.

Yet among the vast number of seals that bear Marian iconography, one group has received little to no attention in the scholarly literature. The images in this category share a common figural detail: above the customary sigla of the MP ΘΥ that flank the Virgin,

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<sup>1</sup>N. Lihačev, *Istoričeskoe značenie italo-grēčeskoj ikonopisi izobrazenija Bogomateri* (St. Petersburg, 1911).

<sup>2</sup>N. Kondakov, *Ikonografija Bogomateri*, I-II (St. Petersburg, 1914–15).

<sup>3</sup>G. Galavaris, “The Mother of God of the Kanikleion,” *GRBS* 2 (1959), 177–82; idem, “The Mother of God ‘Stabbed With a Knife,’” *DOP* 13 (1959), 229–33; idem, “The Representation of the Virgin and Child on a ‘Thokos’ on Seals of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchs,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.*, per. 4, 2 (1960–61[1962]), 154–81; and idem, “Observations on the Date of the Apse Mosaic of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople,” *Actes du XIIe congrès international des études byzantines, Ochride, 10–16 Septembre, 1961*, III (Belgrade, 1964), 107–10. Galavaris’ fourteenth-century dating of the apse mosaic is erroneous. For the ninth-century dating, see R. Cormack, “Interpreting the Mosaics of S. Sophia at Istanbul,” *Art History* 4 (1981), 135–38 (repr. in his *The Byzantine Eye: Studies in Art and Patronage* [London, 1989], pt. VIII).

<sup>4</sup>N. Oikonomides, “Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia,” *DOP* 39 (1985), 111–15, reassigned the apse mosaic of the Virgin and Child to the years of the Iconophile interlude, more specifically, between 787–797.

<sup>5</sup>A. Cutler, “The Cult of the Galaktotrophousa in Byzantium and Italy,” *JÖB* 37 (1987), 336–50.

<sup>6</sup>I. Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became *Meter Theou*,” *DOP* 44 (1990), 165–72.

<sup>7</sup>W. Seibt, “Der Bildtypus der Theotokos Nikopoios: Zur Ikonographie des Gottesmutter-Ikone, die 1030/31 in der Blachernenkirche wiederaufgefunden,” *Byzantina* 13 (1985), 550–64, and idem, “Die Darstellung der Theotokos auf byzantinischen Bleisiegeln besonders im 11. Jahrhundert,” *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*, I, ed. N. Oikonomides (Washington, D.C., 1987), 35–56.

there appear tear-shaped globules. In the collection of Dumbarton Oaks/Fogg Museum, I have identified fifty-nine unpublished pieces. These globules are found with three Marian types: fourteen accompany the Virgin Nikopoios (Fig. 1);<sup>8</sup> thirty-nine flank the Virgin with her hands raised before her breast (Fig. 2);<sup>9</sup> and six appear with the Hodegetria (Fig. 3).<sup>10</sup> Five of these bear Syriac inscriptions instead of the usual Greek (Fig. 4).<sup>11</sup> Among the published collections of seals, I have recorded forty-nine examples: twenty-four with the Virgin Nikopoios;<sup>12</sup> twenty with the image of the Virgin with her hands raised before her breast;<sup>13</sup> four with the Hodegetria;<sup>14</sup> and one with the Virgin orans.<sup>15</sup> From the total of 108 specimens, all belong to the eleventh century, except for five among those published that may be assigned to the late tenth or early eleventh century.<sup>16</sup>

To my knowledge, these globules are not found on images of the Virgin in other media except for a few coins. These numismatic examples include a two-thirds miliaresion of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) with a bust image of the Virgin orans identified as H BAAXEPNITICA (Fig. 5);<sup>17</sup> a two-thirds miliaresion of Constantine X (1059–67) depicting the Virgin orans (Fig. 6);<sup>18</sup> a tetarteron of Michael VII Doukas

<sup>8</sup>D.O. 58.106.2926. The other thirteen are 58.106.2221, 58.106.2642, 58.106.4661, 58.106.5587, 79.33.3, Fogg 1462, Fogg 1612, Fogg 2287, Fogg 3075, Fogg 3736, Shaw 354, Shaw 356, and Shaw 890.

<sup>9</sup>D.O. 58.106.4505. The others are 55.1.1822, 55.1.2480, 55.1.2519, 58.106.1154, 58.106.1309, 58.106.1406, 58.106.1542, 58.106.1681, 58.106.1851, 58.106.1855, 58.106.1948, 58.106.2178, 58.106.2689, 58.106.2914, 58.106.3298, 58.106.4025, 58.106.4959, 58.106.4988, 58.106.5052, 58.106.5143, 58.106.5165, 58.106.5174, 58.106.5290, 58.106.5439, 58.106.5604, Fogg 116, Fogg 551, Fogg 577, Fogg 1330, Fogg 1989, Fogg 2063, Fogg 2282, Fogg 2513, Fogg 3466, Fogg 3599, Shaw 32, Shaw 800, and Shaw 1311.

<sup>10</sup>Fogg 539. The remainder are 58.106.3795, 58.106.4083, 58.106.5118, Fogg 699, and Fogg 2603.

<sup>11</sup>D.O. 58.106.5587. The other four with Syriac inscriptions are 58.106.2642, 58.106.4988, 58.106.5290, and Fogg 3736.

<sup>12</sup>A. Dunn, *A Handlist of the Byzantine Lead Seals and Tokens in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1983), no. 119; W. de Gray Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1898), no. 17971; K. Konstantopoulos, *Βυζαντιακά Μολυβδόβουλλα τοῦ ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἐθνικοῦ Νομισματικοῦ Μουσείου* (Athens, 1917), nos. 382, 688ζ, and 1046; V. Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médailleur Vatican* (Vatican City, 1962), no. 129; idem, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin, V. 1–3, L'église* (Paris, 1963–72), nos. 241, 720, 732, 1236, 1801, 1927, and 1933; idem, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin, II, L'administration centrale* (Paris, 1981), no. 551; J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Lead Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art, I: Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea* (Washington, D.C., 1991), no. 1.24a and b; B. Pančenko, "Katalog Molivdovulov," *IRAIK* 8 (1903), no. 94; G. Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1884), no. 170.2a; G. Schlumberger, "Sceaux byzantins inédits," *RN* 9 (1905), no. 222; G. Zacos and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, I. 1–3 (Basel, 1972), no. 2678b; and G. Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, ed. J. Nesbitt (Bern, 1984), nos. 507, 680, 695, and 809.

<sup>13</sup>J.-C. Cheynet, C. Morrison, and W. Seibt, *Sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris, 1991), nos. 15 and 80; Konstantopoulos, *Βυζαντιακά Μολυβδόβουλλα*, nos. 371α and 547; Laurent, *Corpus V*, nos. 630, 1139, 1170, and 1672; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Lead Seals*, nos. 59.2, 71.10; B. Pančenko, "Katalog Molivdovulov," *IRAIK* 9 (1904), no. 131 and ibid., 13 (1908), no. 414; Šandrovskaja, "Sfragistika," *Iskusstvo Vizantii v Sobranijah SSSR, I–III* (Moscow, 1977), no. 791; Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, nos. 282.2 and 285.2; idem, "Sceaux inédits," no. 217; Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, nos. 370, 556, 724, and 757.

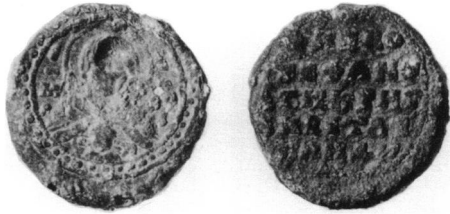
<sup>14</sup>Laurent, *Corpus*, V, no. 695; Šandrovskaja, "Sfragistika," no. 741; Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, nos. 372 and 546.

<sup>15</sup>Schlumberger, "Sceaux inédits," no. 279.

<sup>16</sup>Laurent, *Corpus*, V, no. 1236; Laurent, *Corpus*, II, no. 551; Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Lead Seals*, no. 1.24a and b; and Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, no. 809.

<sup>17</sup>C. Morrisson, *Catalogue des monnaies byzantine de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, II (Paris, 1970), pl. 86, nos. 9 and 635.

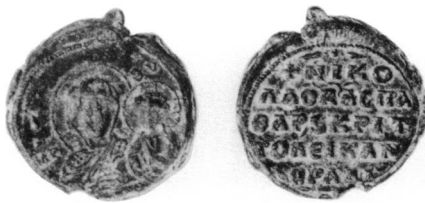
<sup>18</sup>P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, III. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1973; hereafter, *DOC*), pl. 64, no. 6e.



1 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., lead seal, 58.106.2926: The Virgin Nikopoios (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



2 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., lead seal, 58.106.4505: The Virgin with her hands raised before her breast (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



3 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., lead seal, Fogg 539: The Virgin Hodegetria (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



4 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., lead seal, 58.106.5587: The Virgin Nikopoios (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



5 Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, two-thirds miliaresion of Constantine IX Monomachos, Schl. 3251: The Virgin Blachernitissa (after Morrisson, *Catalogue*, pl. 86, no. 9)



6 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., two-thirds miliaresion Constantine X: The Virgin orans (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



7 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., tetrarteron of Michael VII Doukas: The Virgin Nikopoios (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



8 Follis of Alexios I: The Virgin Nikopoios (photo: after Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, pl. 59, no. 1024)



9 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., anonymous follis: Christ (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



10 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., two-thirds miliaresion of Michael VII Doukas: Christ (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



11 Tetrarteron of Alexios I: Christ (photo: after Hendy, *Coinage*, pl. 2, no. 2)



12 Khludov Psalter (Moscow, Hist. Mus. gr. 129D, fol. 62v): The Pentecost (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



13 Dionysiou lectionary (Athos, Dionysiou cod. 587, fol. 36v): The Pentecost  
(photo: after Pelekanides et al., *The Treasures of Mount Athos*, I, fig. 213)



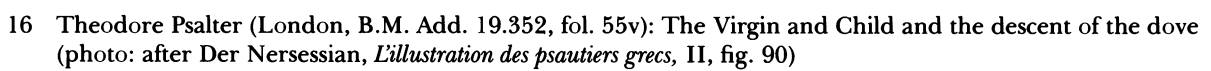


14 Khludov Psalter (Moscow, Hist. Mus. gr. 129D, fol. 44): The Virgin and Child and the descent of the dove (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)



15 Pantokrator Psalter (Athos, Pantok. 61, fol. 93v): The Virgin and the descent of the dove  
 (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)





(1071–78) with the bust of the Virgin Nikopoios (Fig. 7);<sup>19</sup> and a follis of Alexios I issued before his monetary reforms of 1092, also with the Nikopoios (Fig. 8).<sup>20</sup> On coins, however, these globules also appear with three different images of Christ: on an anonymous follis with the bust of Christ, assigned by Grierson to the years 976–1035 (Fig. 9);<sup>21</sup> on a two-thirds miliaresion issued by Michael VII Doukas (1071–78) depicting Christ on a thokos (Fig. 10);<sup>22</sup> and a tetarteron with the bust of Christ issued by Alexios I, again, before his monetary reforms of 1092 (Fig. 11).<sup>23</sup> The numismatic examples, like their sphragistic counterparts, also exhibit the tear-shaped globules possibly as early as the late tenth century, while the majority belong to the eleventh. On the seals, however, this detail occurs only with the image of the Virgin, and it is the Marian images that will be the focus of this paper.

Among numismatists, only Grierson has commented on these globules. He describes them as “pear-shaped” ornaments but offers no interpretation as to their significance.<sup>24</sup> Most authors have not cited this iconographic detail in various seal catalogues.<sup>25</sup> Zacos and Veglery, however, first referred to this iconographic device on seals as “tongues of fire.”<sup>26</sup> The term was adopted subsequently by Nesbitt and Oikonomides in their recent catalogue of seals from the Dumbarton Oaks collection, where it now finds a place within the iconographic index.<sup>27</sup> This nomenclature shall be used in the present discussion.

Although the “tongues of fire” accompany images of the Virgin on seals, and on a few coins as well, examples of the tear-shaped globules *themselves* can be found in other media in other contexts. They are employed to represent the fiery tongues in the descent of the Holy Spirit in scenes of the Pentecost. Two examples are the ninth-century Khudov Psalter (Fig. 12)<sup>28</sup> and that from the eleventh-century Dionysiou lectionary (Fig. 13).<sup>29</sup>

In one of the entries in Zacos’ second volume concerning the seals under discussion, the author refers to the tongues of fire flanking the Virgin as the descent of the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> He does not, however, clarify or elaborate on this interpretation. Although the tear-shaped devices on the seals resemble the tongues of fire in scenes of the Pentecost, the Virgin is not mentioned in the biblical account concerning the Descent of the Holy

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pl. 66, no. 5d.1.

<sup>20</sup>P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (London, 1982), 224, no. 1024, pl. 59.

<sup>21</sup>Grierson, *DOC*, III. 2 pl. 50, no. A2.9. A more recent discussion of the anonymous folles series is provided by V. Ivanišević, “Interpretation and Dating of the Folles of Basil II and Constantine VIII-the Class A2,” *ZRVI* 27–28 (1989), 19–42, who publishes another specimen (pl. 1, no. 1) and assigns this variety to the years 976–1001/1002.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pl. 67, no. 11a.

<sup>23</sup>M. Hendy, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire 1081–1261* (Washington, D.C., 1969), pl. 2, 2.

<sup>24</sup>Grierson, *DOC*, III. 2, 646, nos. 9, 809, and 816. Hendy, *Coinage*, 72, does not cite their presence on the tetarteron of Alexios I, while Morrisson, *Monnaies byzantines*, nos. 47.9 and 635, nos. 51.5 and 644, and 55.15c and 656, reproduces the iconographic devices in her tables but without any commentary.

<sup>25</sup>For example, in the recent publication of Cheynet, Morrisson, and Seibt, *Collection Henri Seyrig*, the authors make no reference to the globules flanking the Virgin on two of the specimens, nos. 15 and 80.

<sup>26</sup>Zacos and Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 1.3, no. 2678b.

<sup>27</sup>Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *Lead Seals*, 245. According to the authors, the “tongues of fire” appear on two examples, nos. 1.24 and 71.10, yet they also accompany the image of the Virgin on a third seal, no. 59.2.

<sup>28</sup>M. Ščepkina, *Miniatury Khudovskoj Psaltyri* (Moscow, 1977), 62v.

<sup>29</sup>S. Pelekanidis et al., *The Treasures of Mount Athos*, I (Athens, 1973), 174, fig. 213.

<sup>30</sup>Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, no. 556.

Spirit on the Apostles (Acts 2:1–4), nor is she included in depictions of the Pentecost, except for the sixth-century example in the Rabbula Gospels.<sup>31</sup> The only scriptural reference to a Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Virgin is that of the Annunciation (Matt. 1:1–18 and Luke 1:26–38). The seals which bear the tongues of fire, however, need not be understood as an abbreviated form of the Annunciation suitable for small objects such as seals, since there are numerous sigillographic examples depicting the Annunciation.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, many of the seals with the tongues of fire flank images of the Virgin *with* a medallion of Christ on her breast. Although the late twelfth-century icon of the Annunciation at Sinai does include a similar medallion of Christ on the torso of the Virgin,<sup>33</sup> this is a rare addition to this scene during the Byzantine period. Therefore, it is not likely that the presence of the globules on the seals makes an explicit association between such images of the Virgin and Child and that of the Annunciation. Some other interpretation is required.

The closest related examples to this sphragistic iconography, however, are found in miniatures of the marginal psalters. In the Khludov Psalter, a medallion of the bust of the Virgin with Christ held before her is placed below heavenly rays and a dove descending from the Hand of God (Fig. 14).<sup>34</sup> This image illustrates Ps. 44:2, "Thou art more beautiful than the sons of men: grace has been shed forth on thy lips: therefore God has blessed thee forever." In the ninth-century Pantokrator Psalter, a similar image with the bust of the Virgin with her hands raised before her breast is placed at Ps. 71:6, "He shall come down as rain upon a fleece; and as drops falling upon the earth" (Fig. 15).<sup>35</sup> This verse receives a similar illustration in the Bristol Psalter of ca. 1000,<sup>36</sup> and in the Theodore Psalter of 1066, Ps. 44:2 is provided with an image resembling that accompanying the identical verse in the earlier Khludov Psalter (Fig. 16).<sup>37</sup> The importance of these miniatures in association with their particular psalm verses as illustrations of the theme of the Incarnation and its relation to the Old Testament prefiguration of the rain falling on Gedeon's fleece has been discussed by Kitzinger<sup>38</sup> and Kartsonis.<sup>39</sup> The divine rays depicted above the medallions of the Virgin and Child in the manuscripts may be likened to the tongues of fire that have been transferred to the field of the seals. The theme of the Incarnation may offer at least a partial explanation of the sphragistic iconography.

<sup>31</sup>C. Cecchelli, G. Furlani, and M. Salmi, *The Rabbula Gospels* (Olten-Lausanne, 1959), fol. 14b. For a survey of the iconography of Pentecost in the tradition of both the East and the West, see G. Schiller, *Die Kirche, Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, IV.1 (Gütersloh, 1976), 11–38, figs. 1–92.

<sup>32</sup>For several specimens, see Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, I, nos. 2738, 2741, 2743, 2744, and 2951, and Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, nos. 368a, 410, 514, and 771.

<sup>33</sup>*Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. K. Manafis (Athens, 1990), 107–8, fig. 29.

<sup>34</sup>Ščepkina, *Miniatjura*, 44.

<sup>35</sup>S. Dufrenne, *L'illustration des psautiers grecs du moyen âge*, I (Paris, 1966), 28, pl. 12.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 61, pl. 54.

<sup>37</sup>S. Der Nersessian, *L'illustration des psautiers grecs du moyen âge*, II (Paris, 1970), 30, pl. 29. Similar figures also illustrate the identical verses in the late eleventh-century Barberini Psalter. For a discussion of these miniatures, see J. Anderson, P. Canart, and C. Walter, *The Barberini Psalter, Codex Vaticanus Barberinianus Graecus 372* (Zürich, 1989), 84 and 100.

<sup>38</sup>E. Kitzinger, "The Descent of the Dove: Observations on the Mosaic of the Annunciation in the Cappella Palatina in Palermo," in *Byzanz und der Westen: Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters*, ed. I. Hutter (Vienna, 1984), 99–115.

<sup>39</sup>A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, 1986), 191–203, where the Davidic ancestry of Christ is also treated.

The question remains, however, as to why this iconographic formula appears on a group of seals, the majority of which belong to the eleventh century, and a few contemporary coins, when the themes of the Incarnation and Gedeon's fleece have a long history in both Byzantine liturgical and artistic expression.<sup>40</sup> This sigillographic iconography does, however, parallel other eleventh-century phenomena that reflect a new attitude toward religious images whereby icons were perceived to take on a more dynamic and interactive role within the sphere of devotional practices. One significant example is that of the so-called habitual or usual miracle (τὸ σύνηθες θαῦμα) concerning an image of the Virgin in the Marian church of Blachernai. An account of this phenomenon is provided by Michael Psellos from the year 1075.<sup>41</sup> In this text, Psellos relates that at Blachernai there was an icon of the Virgin covered by a veil. Every Friday evening, after sunset, the veil mysteriously rose and remained suspended in mid-air before a large crowd. In explaining the event, Psellos claims that the Divine Spirit descends upon the image (τοῦ Θεοῦ Πνεύματος ἄντικρυς κάθοδος).<sup>42</sup> He describes how the form of the Virgin is changed and receives her animated presence (τὴν ἔμψυχον ἐπιδημίαν αὐτῆς).<sup>43</sup> Further on in his account, Psellos refers to this phenomenon as a new manifestation of the Spirit (νέα πνεύματος ἔμφασις).<sup>44</sup>

Elsewhere, Psellos recorded the activity concerning another eleventh-century image that exhibited similar lifelike characteristics, the celebrated icon of Christ Antiphonites that belonged to the empress Zoe.<sup>45</sup> According to Psellos, the empress would turn to this icon when expressing gratitude for favors received or beseech it when troubles befell her. In response to the petitions of the empress, the figure of Christ would turn either red to indicate a favorable reply or pale to portend an unfavorable outcome. When de-

<sup>40</sup>For studies dealing with the iconography of Gedeon's fleece, see D. Mouriki, "Αἱ Βιβλικαὶ Προεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν Τροῦλλον τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρᾶ," *Αρχ.Δελτ.* 25 (1970), 217–51 and 267–70, and N. Drandakes, "Πόκος ἢ Νεφέλη; Ἀσυνήθιστη Λεπτομέρεια τῆς Παραστάσεως τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ στὴ Βυζαντινὴ Εἰκονογραφία," *Ἐπιστ.Ἐπ.Φιλ.Σχ.Αθ.* 26 (1977–78), 258–67.

<sup>41</sup>Λόγος ἐπὶ τῷ ἐν Βλαχέρναις γεγονότι Θαύματι, ed. J. Bidez, *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*, VI (Brussels, 1928), 192–210, esp. 194–96. Prof. Elizabeth Fisher is preparing a new edition of this text for Teubner. Partial editions of the account have been provided by X. Siderides, *Ὁρθοδοξία* 2 (1928), 511–19; J. Papadopoulos, *Les palais et les églises des Blachernes* (Athens, 1928), 31–37; and V. Grumel, "Le 'miracle habituel' de Notre-Dame des Blachernes," *EO* 30 (1931), 129–46.

<sup>42</sup>Λόγος, 195.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.* When describing the transformation of this icon, Psellos does not offer any information as to the Marian iconographic type represented. This absence of specificity is again encountered in the early twelfth-century reference to this miracle provided by Anna Komnene, *Alexiade*, ed. B. Leib, III (Paris, 1945), 87. For discussions devoted to the iconographic type of this particular icon, see Grumel, "Le 'miracle habituel,'" 145; C. Belting-Ihm, *Sub matris tutela: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte der Schutzmantelmadonna* (Heidelberg, 1976), 51–52; Seibt, "Der Bildtypus der Theotokos Nikopoios," 560–61, and *idem*, "Die Darstellung der Theotokos," 54; I. Tognazzi-Zervou, "L'iconografia e la 'Vita' delle miracolose icone delle Theotokos Brefokratousa: Blachernitissa e Odghitria," *BollGrott* 40 (1986), 275; and H. Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich, 1990), 210.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 199–200.

<sup>45</sup>*Chronographia*, ed. E. Renauld (Paris, 1926), 149–50. For discussion of this icon, see C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen, 1959), 142–48; G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, D.C., 1984), 356–60; and A. Kazhdan and H. Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art," *DOP* 45 (1991), 15–16. For later examples of the image of Christ Antiphonites, see Z. Rasolkoska-Nikolovska, "Le Christ Antiphonitis d'après les monuments à Chypre," in *Πρακτικὰ τοῦ Δευτέρου Διεθνoῦς Κυπριολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου*, II (Nicosia, 1986), 523–27.

scribing this image, Psellos refers to it as almost alive (μικροῦ δεῖν ἔμπνουν)<sup>46</sup> and says that Zoe would speak to it as if it were animated (καὶ ὡς ἐμψύχῳ διαλεγομένην).<sup>47</sup>

In yet a third text, Psellos employed approximately identical terms when he described an icon of the Crucifixion.<sup>48</sup> He characterizes the panel as a form of animated painting (ἡ ἔμψυχος αὕτη γραφή)<sup>49</sup> and values the image for its verisimilitude and sense of movement (τῷ δοκεῖν ἐμψυχῶσθαι σύμπασαν τὴν εἰκόνα καὶ μηδεμιᾶς τῶν κινήσεων).<sup>50</sup> According to Psellos, the beauty of this icon does not originate in its colors but rather derives from the scene's kinetic qualities (δὲ οὐκ ἐκ χρωμάτων τὰ τοιαῦτα δοκεῖ συνεστάναι, ἀλλ' ἔοικε τὸ σύμπαν ἐμψύχῳ φύσει καὶ ἄτεχνῶς κινουμένη).<sup>51</sup>

In light of these references, therefore, one may find support for Zacos' interpretation that the tongues of fire flanking images of the Virgin on seals depict a Descent of the Holy Spirit. This sphragistic iconography corresponds to a period in which the potential for images to take on life through the operation of the Holy Spirit was acknowledged. This means of animation was explicitly stated in the narration concerning the miraculous Marian icon at Blachernai. The adoption of such images for objects of personal use, such as seals, also reflects eleventh-century artistic and devotional currents. In his discussion related to these phenomena, Belting associated this new, animated style of painting (ἡ ἔμψυχος αὕτη γραφή) of the eleventh century with the increased use of images in private devotions.<sup>52</sup> His conclusion accords with observations made by Kazhdan and Epstein who described this century as a time of growing individualism and atomism within Byzantine society.<sup>53</sup> At this time, the development of private devotional practices was encouraged whereby icons in churches could be made more accessible and immediate through the use of *proskynetaria*, reflecting greater intimacy with holy images.<sup>54</sup> When discussing images in the Theodore Psalter of 1066, Walter described various figures that are shown offering their prayers to icons and determined that such depictions first appear in the eleventh century.<sup>55</sup> It is from this period that images of the Virgin flanked by the tongues of fire were chosen by individuals for their seals; that is, objects of personal use were used to reflect their owner's piety.

These enlivened images also had the ability to acquire the attributes of great cultic devotions. Regarding the phenomenon at Blachernai, Psellos informs us that it was a weekly event and that the miraculous icon was the recipient of propitiatory prayers (εὐχαὶ ἱλαστήριοι).<sup>56</sup> The faithful also turned to this spectacle for protection and refuge (ἐν καινῷ τινι ἀδύτῳ καὶ ἀσύλῳ καταφυγῇ).<sup>57</sup> The widespread attention to such phenom-

<sup>46</sup>*Chronographia*, 149. 4.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 149. 12–13.

<sup>48</sup>P. Gautier, "Un discours inédit de Michel Psellos sur la Crucifixion," *REB* 49 (1991), 5–66.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 66. 1425.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 65. 1413. For a recent discussion of Psellos' varied responses toward religious images, including aesthetic sensibilities, see R. Browning and A. Cutler, "In the Margins of Byzantium? Some Icons in Michael Psellos," *BMGS* 16 (1992), 21–32.

<sup>51</sup>Gautier, "Un discours," 65. 1421–1422.

<sup>52</sup>Belting, *Bild und Kult*, 292–330.

<sup>53</sup>A. Kazhdan and A. Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985), 86–99, and 233.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>55</sup>C. Walter, "'Latter-Day' Saints in the Model for the London and Barberini Psalters," *REB* 46 (1988), 213.

<sup>56</sup>Λόγος, 194.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 195.



ena finds its parallel in the sphragistic evidence that reveals a variety of owners selected the figure of the Virgin flanked by tongues of fire for their seals. From the total of unpublished and published specimens, forty-seven belonged to members of the civil bureaucracy, six held military positions, twelve come from ecclesiastical hierarchs, thirteen indicate monastic owners, and thirty cannot be determined. The five examples bearing Syriac inscriptions further testify to the diffusion of this type of imagery.

As noted previously, the “tongues of fire” also flank three numismatic images of Christ (Figs. 9–11). They do not accompany his portrait on seals. These coins likewise span from possibly as early as the late tenth century until the end of the eleventh. It is important to emphasize here that only three different coin types depict Christ with the tongues of fire and just four numismatic pieces bear this detail in conjunction with Marian images. This is a striking contrast to the 108 seals that exhibit this detail. These observations point to the essential difference between coins and seals: seals were objects of personal use issued by a variety of individuals, while coins, produced under the control of imperial mints, were the official means of exchange. The numismatic images of Christ with the tongues of fire appear, therefore, to have been of limited, imperial concern, and this restricted preference finds an interesting parallel in the imperial use of the icon of Christ Antiphonites mentioned above. The religious imagery found on seals reflects a more personal, and consequently a more varied, iconographic choice on the part of their owners. When discussing the context in which the animated style of painting appeared, Belting indicated that this phenomenon coincided with a new, intensified interest in images of the Virgin and Child that emphasized, in rhetorical, poetic expressions, both Mary’s role in the Incarnation and her intercessory powers.<sup>58</sup> In his discourse on the icon of the Crucifixion, Psellos describes the Virgin standing at the foot of the cross as an animated figure of virtue (τὸ ἔμψυχον τῶν ἀρετῶν ἄγαλμα).<sup>59</sup> Within this artistic and religious climate, individuals could select an image of the Virgin and Child flanked by tongues of fire for their seals and thereby give visual expression to their private hopes in the efficacy of such animated icons.

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<sup>58</sup>Belting, *Bild und Kult*, 314–30. For a more in-depth study of the relationship between art and rhetoric in Byzantium, and with particular attention to images of the Virgin, see H. Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, 1981), 9–21 and 96–108.

<sup>59</sup>Gautier, “Un discours,” 63. 1344–1345.